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The Future of The Drake Dance Team

As the 11 women of The Drake Dance Team perform on the basketball court, people in the audience watch in awe as they kick their feet above their heads and move in sync with one another.

What many of the audience members don't know is this dance team only performs during basketball and football games. Many don't realize The Drake Dance team is not competitive even though many come from a competitive high school dance team.

"I was on my high school's varsity dance team and then I competed with my studio... I was dancing 20 plus hours a week," said Amanda Shiffrin, a first-year at Drake University.

Grace Lybeck, another first-year, would practice three hours a day after school, four to five days a week depending on the season. She also had some once in a lifetime opportunities because of her high school dance team.

"I had the opportunity to dance in the Superbowl with Justin Timberlake at our US Bank Stadium with other dance teams in the area," Lybeck said.

Lauren Kennon, one of the team captains, started dancing in a studio. In high school, she was on the cheer team before she switched back to dance once she got to Drake. Even though she was not part of a high school dance team, her competitive background is still the same.

"My high school [cheer team] was state champions 10 years running so we were entirely focused on competing," Kennon said. "[I would practice] every night for at least three hours, every week."

One of the main reasons The Drake Dance Team isn't competitive is because of resources. They are not run under the Athletics Department so they don't receive any funding from the school. Competitions have fees and require uniforms, a coach and choreographer along with transportation and music. Uniforms alone could cost up to \$3,000.

The team is reusing uniforms from about five or six years ago when the Dance Team was competitive. The team used to be split into two teams, one competitive and one for sidelines, Kennon said. The team eventually eliminated the competition team because it was difficult to manage and the team wasn't doing well against other schools. Because of this, the team also lost its resources from the Athletics Department.

"The biggest push for me is to be officially recognized as an athletics team because then come the resources and the support from the school and that's what we need," Kennon said.

Simply getting recognized as an official team could provide numerous opportunities for the dance team. They would be able to hire a coach, someone to dedicate multiple hours to the team and also be able to recruit more dancers. Competitions would also be a chance to meet other teams and challenge the team as a whole, however, dancers on the team appreciate the lower commitment level at Drake.

"In college, you have so much going on so it's a way to keep me in shape and keep me dancing," Lybeck said. "[Competing] put a lot of pressure on me and made me nervous. This is less stressful so I enjoy that."

Many of the women of the team are part of other organizations, clubs and Greek life. Some also have jobs around Des Moines. With time commitment being about three hours a week at Drake, it allows the dancers to get involved around campus and meet a variety of people

through different activities. It is especially helpful for the first years as they adjust to college life and their school work.

“[As a freshman], I needed to figure out how to manage my time well,” Kennon said. “It’s lessened but for a good reason.”

While competitions can be stressful for dancers and require much more time, they can also be rewarding. Even making it to nationals and not winning can give the team a sense of accomplishment.

“[My high school team] won state with our kick routine and got 11th out of 25 for our game day routine so that was awesome,” Shiffrin said, smiling.

As the team starts to become more competitive, they will start slow. For the first few years, they will be part of one competition in Des Moines. This will help the team avoid transportation costs and gradually increase commitment throughout the years.

Even though she is graduating this spring, Kennon hopes that, as the team grows, they will be able to go to state and possibly even nationals in Florida with the other college dance teams. For now, the team will work toward becoming recognized as an official team.